

See also Coping; Self; Self-Deception; Self-Discrepancy Theory

Further Readings

Baumeister, R. F. (1990). Suicide as escape from the self. *Psychological Review*, 97, 90–113.

ETHNOCENTRISM

Definition

Ethnocentrism is the tendency to view the world through the lens of one's own culture. That is, individuals tend to judge others' behaviors, customs, beliefs, and attitudes by their own cultural standards. The phenomenon of ethnocentrism is believed to occur largely because individuals have the greatest awareness and information about their own culture, which erroneously leads them to believe that the norms, standards, and values within their own culture are universally adopted. Ethnocentrism is a general phenomenon that occurs for individuals across most cultures and societies, although the extent to which it occurs may vary.

Background and Research

In 1906, William Graham Sumner, a professor of political and social science at Yale University, first coined the term *ethnocentrism*. Sumner defined it as the tendency to believe that one's society or culture is the center of all others and is the basis for judging other groups. Moreover, Sumner argued ethnocentrism is the tendency to believe that one's own society or culture is superior to other groups.

Since Sumner's original definition, early psychological researchers continued to define ethnocentrism similarly. In the 1950s, for instance, T. W. Adorno and his colleagues devised an ethnocentrism subscale that was a component of the larger authoritarianism construct. These researchers believed that ethnocentrism comprises both ingroup favoritism and a denigration of outgroups. Evidence for Sumner's conception of ethnocentrism comes from research that demonstrated an inverse relation between ingroup attitudes and outgroup attitudes. This research supported the idea that individuals that have a high opinion of one's own group also correspond to negativity toward outgroups. In addition, such research showed the generalizability

of negative opinions toward outgroups; that is, individuals who have negative attitudes toward one group also tend to have negative attitudes toward other groups. Thus, this early perspective equated ethnocentrism with ethnic prejudice, racism, or both.

More recently, researchers have tended to define ethnocentrism more broadly; for instance, they propose that individuals use their own cultures to judge other outgroups, but they do not necessarily have to have negative evaluations of these outgroups. For example, Marilyn Brewer and her colleagues found that individuals can hold simultaneously positive attitudes toward their own group and outgroups even when they differ on some value, attitude, or behavior. This finding has been confirmed in multiple cultural groups including those in Africa, New Guinea, North America, and Asia. Additional research on ethnocentrism has revealed that correlations between ingroup and outgroup attitudes are not always negative; rather, they vary widely. Lastly, research demonstrates that under conditions of intergroup competition, conflict, or threat, individuals may be more likely to have increased ingroup identification and outgroup hostility. As a whole, then, ethnocentrism is not necessarily equated with ethnic prejudice and racism; instead, it is the tendency to use one's group or culture as a reference in judging other groups, with this judgment resulting in negative, indifferent, or positive evaluation.

Michelle R. Hebl

Juan M. Madera

See also Authoritarian Personality; Culture; Ingroup–Outgroup Bias; Prejudice

Further Readings

Brewer, M. B. (2005). Ethnocentrism and prejudice: A search for universals. In C. S. Crandall & M. Schaller (Eds.), *Social psychology of prejudice: Historical and contemporary issues* (pp. 79–93). Lawrence, KS: Lewinian Press.

ETHOLOGY

Definition

Ethology is the study of the biological bases of behavior. This subdiscipline of the behavioral sciences uses methods of objective observation, detailed analysis,